

Message from the National Immunization Program's Acting Director, Dr. Steve Cochi

The 20th century witnessed the global eradication of smallpox, the disappearance of polio from nearly all countries on earth, and a dramatic drop in the incidence of many disabling or deadly diseases. The high standard of public health that we enjoy and depend upon has been made possible, in large part, by the development and use of vaccines. In 2005, the year of the 50th anniversary of the licensure of the Salk polio vaccine, we can celebrate tremendous gains in national and international public health and reflect on the role immunization has played in improving child survival and enhancing quality of life. In the 21st century, we can look forward to the eradication of polio and the continued, increasingly widespread prevention of other devastating diseases.

Because of our extraordinarily successful vaccination programs, we have lost much of our cultural and institutional memory of the ravages of disease. To Americans, polio, diphtheria, and other vaccine-preventable diseases may now seem remote and unthreatening. Hospitals are no longer filled with children and adolescents encased in iron lungs, unable to breathe on their own. Parents no longer dread summer vacation, with trips to the movies or public swimming pools where children might be infected without warning. We don't see the disabled survivors who are unable to walk or stand without assistance and whose entire lives have been completely changed by a single infection. Children are born without risk of birth defects or illness resulting from the mother's infection by rubella, hepatitis, or varicella. Pertussis, diphtheria, and Hib are little-known diseases, and varicella and measles are rapidly becoming diseases of the past. Hepatitis B disease also can be prevented, and the fragile elderly and susceptible young can be protected from influenza.

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—Stephen L. Cochi

The use of vaccines means the disappearance of disease both from our bodies and from our awareness. This happy circumstance might sometimes prevent us, in turn, from fully appreciating the enormous impact of vaccination programs on global health improvement. Vaccinating millions in the U.S. and elsewhere means more than the absence of pain, suffering, and death. It means that not just a fortunate few but the majority

of people everywhere can enjoy freedom from both the effects and the fear of diseases. The energy, resources, and time once spent fighting and sometimes succumbing to disease can be used to develop individual abilities and contribute collectively to the health and success of communities. And, in the age of rapid, readily accessible global transportation, we need to remember that the continued worldwide prevention of disease is essential to maintaining high standards of public health in any community.

Since its inception in 1993, the National Immunization Program (NIP) has taken a lead in promoting immunization and providing access to safe and effective vaccines both in the U.S. and around the world. As we close in on polio, measles, and rubella, research and development of vaccines for other deadly diseases continues. NIP will carry on its successful efforts to extend immunization and to ensure that people understand and participate in the benefits of disease prevention. Join me in renewing our commitment to make healthier, safer, and more productive lives a reality for people in the U.S. and around the world.

Sincerely,



Stephen L. Cochi, M.D., M.P.H.
Acting Director, National Immunization Program